BELLINGHAM HISTORICAL COMMISSION, PUBLISHER

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GRAND REOPENING OF THE ERNEST A. TAFT JR. HISTORICAL MUSEUM

After two years of work to renovate both the physical space and reorganize the museum collection, on Sunday, May 22, 2022 the Bellingham Historical Commission proudly reopened the Ernest A. Taft Jr. Historical Museum to the Bellingham Community with a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.

The event was attended by scores of Bellingham residents, current and former, to celebrate the history of Bellingham.

In the spring of 2020, when the museum was shuttered due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Bellingham's Town Administrator Denis Fraine recommended to the Commission members that we take advantage of the closed time to upgrade the facility.

The facility had not been painted in decades. The carpeting was what was left behind in 1989 when the Bellingham Library relocated to Blackstone Street.

The lighting and window treatments were also from the 20th century and needed updating.

Over the summer of 2020, the facility received a fresh coat of paint. Then, with the assistance of the Bellingham High School Football Team, all of the contents of the museum were boxed up and the larger items were moved all to one side of the building or offsite, so that the new flooring could be installed. When one side of the flooring was installed, all of the items were moved to the other side.

New lighting, ceiling fans and electrical service to the building was installed. A mini-split air conditioning unit was installed to replace the inefficient window units that did not fully air condition the space.

Once the physical upgrades were complete, the Commission members got to work on reorganizing the museum collection.

Joanne Arcand (Ernie Taft's sister), Janet Hendrickson (Marcia Crooks' sister) and Judy Cox (Florence McCracken's daughter) cut the ribbon at the Grand Opening. Ernie, Marcia and Florence were past Chairs of the Commission.

MUSEUM RENOVATION (continued)

After a review of the documented museum inventory, the Commission members created a list of the "Best of Bellingham" to be included in the museum collection. In addition, the collection was organized into categories to aid in planning for the display of the items in the renovated space.

In the entryway there is a **Estey Folding Organ,** donated by Adolpha Yerka. This organ, manufactured in Brattleboro, VT in 1919 is the type that was used in World War II by Army Chaplains.

Above the organ are plaques dedicated to Ernie Taft and Florence McCracken, former Commission Chairs as well as a plaque of donors who contributed to this renovation. The full list of donors is on page 7.

On the bookcases to the left and right of the entry inside the door is a short narrative history of Bellingham, by century, starting in the 1600s and ending in 2019, Bellingham's Tricentennial Year!

Entry Display Case

Hanging overhead in the center of the museum, above the display cases is a **48-star US Flag** that belonged to Myla Thayer, and was donated by Jeanne Thayer Kempton.

The front display case has many of Bellingham's irreplaceable treasures and memories.

- **Boston Post Canes** are gold-headed canes that were presented to 700 New England towns by the Boston Post Newspaper with the request that it be presented to the eldest citizen of each community. They were intended as a tribute to honored and useful lives, to thrift, temperance and right living; and above all to the superb vigor of New England manhood and womanhood. It is made of ebony wood from Congo in Africa and the gold is rolled in sheets and soldered to the cane after being shaped. At the current time, a replica of the cane is given to the eldest citizen and the original cane is on display in the museum. The most recent recipient of the cane passed away in the spring of 2022 and we will be awarding the cane to the next eldest resident soon.
- **Amethyst specimens found at Rose Avenue** in Bellingham. The website minedat.org indicates that there are additional amethysts from this location in the Harvard Museum of Natural History.
- **Child's Brown Dress and Pantaloons** worn by Alice Burr, Circa 1830. The Burr family history in Bellingham goes back to the 1700s. Descendants of the Burr family still live on Railroad Street.
- **Bellingham Anniversary Memorabilia** from the 250th, 275th and 300th Anniversary celebrations.
- **Matchstick Model Replica of Assumption Church Altar.** Assumption Church was formerly located in Crooks Corner. The model was donated by St. Blaise Church.

MUSEUM RENOVATION (continued)

The rear display case contains historical documents and books of historical importance.

- **Bellingham Rifle Company Account Book**, 1831-1846
- **Handwritten Account Book, John White**, John Whit(e)'s Book of Counts - Account of Joseph Thompson, 1768.
- **Letter From Daniel Thompson at Fort Cumberland in 1759** describing the harsh winter conditions in the area.
- **Confessions of Boyhood**, by John Albee (1833-1915) is Albee's autobiography of growing up in Bellingham in the 1800s.
- **Militia Book 1810-1830** states that on June 30, 1817 the Bellingham Rifles Militia was ordered to report to the First Parish Meetinghouse in Wrentham, on Tuesday, July 1, 1817 to be "reviewed by the President of the United States." (James Monroe)

Historical Documents and Books of Historical Importance

School & Municipal Area

- **Desk used by Clara Macy** with office and school décor from the mid-20th century, including a **Royal Typewriter used by John Lundvall to type the Crimpville Comments** in the 1970s.
- **Book case** displaying school, library, and municipal memorabilia, artifacts and photographs from a variety of time periods.
- **Wooden pew (bench)** from the original Upper Town Hall, circa 1802. Restored by Avery Osgood, displaying municipal, Grange and other artifacts and memorabilia.
- **Autograph or Album Quilt** is located between the windows above the bench. Made by the Ladies Aid Society of the First Baptist Church. It was started in 1903 and contains 36 squares with 660 names. It was designed by Mrs. R.H. Rand and was completed in 1916.

- **School Picture Gallery** includes class pictures from as far back as the 1890s and a portrait of Clara Macy.
- **Center School Bell, 1891**. The Center School was located on the land where the current Municipal Center is located.

- **1767 Middle Post Road Mile Marker**, noting the distance from Bellingham to Boston at 31 miles. The marker was originally located on Hartford Avenue.
- **Precinct 1 Hand Crank Ballot Box,** circa 1920s
- **Jury Duty Selection Box,** used from mid-1800s to 1970s.

MUSEUM RENOVATION (continued)

Home, Farming, and Industry

- **Antique Wringer Washing Machine**
- **Horse Drawn Pung (Sleigh)** owned by the Goldwaithe brothers, Perry and Francis. They owned and operated the store and railroad station on Pearl Street in the Caryville section of Bellingham, circa 1900-1920. The pung was used by Perry for grocery deliveries in Bellingham.

- **Doll House Replica of 156 Mechanic Street, Cape Cod House, Circa 1920.** Custom built by Dianne Slopak. Replica of her grantparent's (Alcide and Anna Bruneau) home in the 1960s.
- **Farm History and Farming Tools** are on display on the sleigh.
- On the book case behind the sleigh are **two antique samplers,** one from Hopestill B. Scammell, aged 8 years, undated; and a second from Lois Holbrook, aged 11, 1818.
- **Medical Kit Owned by Katherine (Gariepy) Feeney**, Mrs. Babe Ruth's Personal Nurse.
- **Transportation & Boot Making History** on the bookcase and floor display with documents and artifacts.
- **Zenith Floor Model Radio**

Sports & Recreation Area

- **Bellingham's Silver Lake** (originally known as Hoag Lake) has a storied history as a regional vacation spot located on the trolley line. It hosted vaudeville acts, theater and had a merry go round. The lake was purchased by the town in 1998 and now hosts swimming lessons, a splashpad and a playground area for resident families.
- **Sports memorabilia,** including: 1951 Letter Jacket, a Southie's Baseball Uniform, South School Tigers Gym Bag, Sports Letters and a Football from the 1970 Bellingham/Norton Thanksgiving Day Football Game.

- List of members of the Bellingham Athletic Hall of Fame.
- **Business artifacts and memorabilia including**: Chicken Lamp from Ma Glockner's Restaurant, a Benjamin Franklin Savings Bank baseball hat, an Almac's cloth shopping bag, a Bellingham Business Association sign, a copy of Bellinghamopoly 2000, a speaker from the Bellingham Drive-in Movie Theater, and Halloween Toys from the Border Grange.
- Above the sports area display are **School desks from the North, Center and South Schools** framed by white architectural corbels from an unknown building and the 1945 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

MUSEUM RENOVATION (continued)

Research Library Collection

- Complete set of back issues of **The Crimpville Comments, 1970-present**
- **History Books** written about Bellingham and the surrounding areas.
- **Bellingham Family Histories, Journals and Information**
- **Photo Albums**
- **Annual Town Reports from 1872-Present**
- **Bellingham High School Yearbooks**

Military, Public Safety & Civil Defense

- **World War I Group Photos**
- **Biography of Deborah Sampson**
- **History of the Bellingham Rifles Militia**
- **Bellingham made Civil War Era Boots** worn by Charles Burr

- **Civil War Era Message Slate Board** used by Abirim Wales, who resided in the Forbes House on Hartford Avenue.

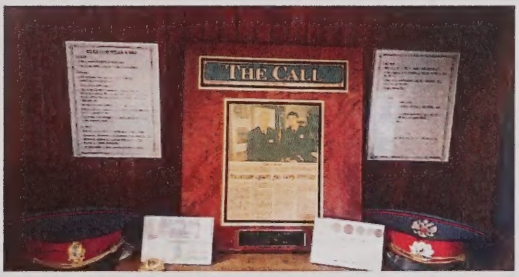
- **WWII artifacts and** memorabilia from Ida (Estes) **Hood's time in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAAC),** including her boots.
- **Miscellaneous artifacts** including a clay tavern innkeepers pipe, a clay trading pipe in the shape of a Native American head, locally found arrow-heads, and a Native American ax head found in the Charles River.
- **POW/MIA "You are not forgotten" Chair.**

Civil Defense

- Two-horsepower **Civil Defense siren** that was located in the Town Hall tower.
- **WWII Civil Defense** First Aid Kits, Booklets, Arm Bands, Helmets, Gas Mask, Sand Pail and Water Drum.

Police & Fire

- Copy of **Fire Marshall Report of Red Mill**, which was destroyed by fire in 1909.
- **"Red Comet" Fire Extinguisher Grenade**, used 1870s to early 1900s.
- Memorabilia from **Chief Boucher's 1995 visit with Ukrainian Police Colonel.**



- **Bellingham, England Bobby Hat**
- **Bellingham Police Cruiser Writing Console, circa 1976**

Uniforms

- On the display table and in the surrounding area are mannequins displaying **military, police and fire uniforms** from various time periods.

Our sincerest thank you to those who made the renovation and reorganization possible!

Commission Members:

Richard D. Marcoux, Chair - Rick coordinated many of the renovation projects with town departments as well as stepped up to perform some of the minor electrical work to move the renovation project along!

Steve Joanis, Vice Chair - Steve was instrumental in assuring that our military and civil defense displays were as historically accurate as we could make them. His extensive knowledge of Bellingham in the 17th and 18th centuries are an asset to the commission.

Bernadette Rivard, Secretary - Bernadette's librarian organizational skills were critical in the layout and reorganization of the museum. Her ability to design and record the details of the items in the collection greatly enhanced the museum's renovation.

Marjorie Turner Hollman - Marjorie began the organization of the Crimpville Comments newsletters to make sure we had a complete set of this important publication that goes back to the 1970s.

Pam Johnson - Pam was helpful in writing descriptions of selected collections, helping us organize collections, and creating the Sports, Recreation & Business Display.

Franco Tocchi - Franco was helpful in moving items around the museum as well as a helpful presence during the grand opening.

Local Vendors:

Carl Deiseo, owner of Car-Leo Flooring of Milford - Carl assisted us in choosing the right LVT flooring for the museum to give us the convenience of vinyl, with the look of aged wood.

Douglas Bulman, owner of Imperial Cleaning of Franklin - Doug spent 5 hours at the museum the week before opening to deep clean the building to be ready for the public.

Gary Remillard, G&L Electric - Gary upgraded the museum's electrical service, and installed new lights and ceiling fans.

Seaport Masonry, Inc. - Seaport Masonry, Inc. replaced the concrete steps to the building.

Victory Heating, Air Conditioning & Plumbing - Victory Heating installed our new mini-split air conditioning system to insure effective, efficient cooling of the building.

Victory Packaging - Victory Packaging donated scores of boxes that were used to box up the collections to prepare the space for renovation.

Town Staff and Volunteers:

Denis Fraine , Town Administrator - Denis was instrumental in getting this project off of the ground. Without his initiative and commitment of town funds the project would not have happened.

Ronald Paulus, Town Carpenter - Ron was at our beck and call for all kinds of projects, from supervising the painting of the interior, to putting all of our display cases on wheels, to creating a storage closet, Ron was always helpful.

Ken Hoyt, Carpenter - Ken as Ron's assistant was always available to assist with the next project to be accomplished!

Roger Hogue & Jack Hamilton, Painters - Roger and Jack turned the tired outdated interior of the building into a brightly painted space!

Avery & Susan Osgood - Avery & Susan repaired and restored the Estey Organ and the Upper Town Hall pew (bench).

Curt Chambers, Town Hall Custodian - Curt was available to assist us with custodial and other jobs to move the project along.

Jesse Reidle, Assistant Director, Bellingham DPW - Jesse and his crew were there for us whenever we literally needed heavy lifting and moving of items, as well as demolishing the front steps for the new steps to be installed.

George Bernard, Bellingham Parks Department - George and the crew from the Parks Department not only assisted in moving heavy objects, but the week before the grand opening they were at the museum tending to the grounds, planting flowers and making the outdoor space visually pleasing.

Tim Aicardi, Building Inspector - Tim was instrumental in getting the front entry steps replaced.

Hilarie Allie, BOS Administrative Assistant - Hilarie was helpful in keeping us on track with expenses and billing.

Lauren Hummel, Senior Tax Work Off Program - Lauren spent untold hours at the museum this spring organizing collections, especially making sure we had 3 full sets of the Crimpville Comments in the collection.

Bellingham High School 2020 Football Team - Assisted in the initial moving of the collections so that the new flooring could be installed.

We thank you all for your dedication to this project!

Museum Renovation Sponsors

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Our sincere appreciation and acknowledgement to the above sponsors who made generous donations to assist in the completion of the 2020-2022 museum renovation. Municipal funds provided painting, flooring and electrical upgrades. The funds provided by these donors enabled us to put the finishing touches on the project to reorganize the museum collections.

Crimpville Comments

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Also open by appointment

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www.bellinghamma.org/historical-commission

Find us on: facebook

www.facebook.com/BellinghamHistoricalCommissionMA/

Home of the Ernest A. Taft Jr. Historical Museum

Save the Date!

August 11, 2022
Closing of the 300th Anniversary Time Capsule at 6 pm at the library during Bellingham Days.

November 5, 2022
Mass Memories Road Show, a project of UMass Boston will be at the library to scan YOUR pictures of Bellingham history. Stay tuned for details!

The Crimpville Comments is mailed free to long time subscribers and is available electronically on the Commission's website, www.bellinghamma.org/historical-commission

You can subscribe to the Commission's electronic newsletter which will link to the Crimpville Comments here: https://bit.ly/3dwc5sf or return the form to the right with your email address.

New subscribers to the print edition are encouraged to make a suggested $20 annual donation to help defray the printing and mailing costs.

The Commission also has a gift fund that can accept donations from the community. As we move forward, we would appreciate your support!

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All correspondence should be mailed to:
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3 Common Street
Bellingham MA 02019

If you wish to donate items or artifacts to the museum please complete and return an Artifact/Material Donation Application Form. Download the form here: **https://bit.ly/3trxJal** or scan this QR Code.